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The troubled chairman

It was only a matter of time before the whispers about Sen. David Durenberger's private hell gained public notice. Some of the story emerged earlier in Minneapolis, the senator's hometown. *The Washington Post* published a forbearing rehash Sunday before last. Now, in a series published this week, our George Archibald has pulled together all the details.

Retelling this pathetic story is meant neither to titillate nor embarrass. It is meant to direct attention to the problem of the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, whose troubled chairman, Mr. Durenberger, shows increasing signs of debilitating distress.

This is a painful judgment, but an inevitable one. Mr. Durenberger's marriage of 14 years has gone smash, his affair with a 28-year-old secretary ended in a public brawl at Washington's National Airport, Boston police arrested him last January for disorderly conduct (a sympathetic magistrate dismissed the charge), and an aide says the senator is undergoing "psychological counseling" to restore his peace of mind.

We have no wish to be unkind, but the fact cannot be ducked. No man so unraveled has any business being a member, let alone the chairman, of the Senate intelligence committee — one of the most sensitive committees on the Hill and one of the leakiest.

According to Rep. Edward Boland, a Democrat and former chairman of the House committee on intelligence, the Durenberger committee has collaborated in the "repeated compromise of sensitive intelligence sources and methods." How much of this, if any, is related to the senator's personal anguish, no one can say. What can be said is that, judged by the available evidence, the senator has come emotionally unstuck, and his committee assignments ought to reflect a prudent regard for that unhappy reality.

Senate leaders ought to have handled the problem months ago, but they shirked the distasteful duty, so that what ought to have been accomplished quietly and decently now must be done in public. It must be done nonetheless if the Senate is to retain the public's confidence and respect.